

# THE ELEMENTARY ENGLISH REVIEW

VOLUME XIII

APRIL 1936

No. 4

## The Relation of Pictures to Reading Comprehension\*

BESS GOODYKOONTZ

*Assistant United States Commissioner of Education*

RECENTLY a prospectus for a new social studies textbook was received which read somewhat as follows: This book, dealing with Old World backgrounds, contains more than 200 actual photographs, line drawings, and reproductions of famous historical paintings. Thus the students' experience is enriched, and visual imagery supplied for the hard concepts or those for which actual experience is impossible. The pictures are decorative to be sure, but through references made to them throughout the text, they add immeasurably to the understanding and pleasure of the reader. This text differs from others in the direct use of the illustrations as an integral part of the teaching.

An advertisement for a new story book for children makes this statement: There are gay, postery sorts of pictures with flat colors, sure to appeal to any child and to lead him on to the very end of the tale. He will say, "This is the best book I've ever had."

A new series of readers for primary grades calls attention to its pictures in this way: The pre-primer picture book

develops a background of experience that ensures reading readiness and eagerness to read. By presenting ideas in pictures, this series guarantees a successful start and ensures that children will read meaningfully from the very beginning.

In each of these descriptive statements about books for children, the relation of pictures to comprehension of the text is emphasized. Pictures are said to enrich experience, supply visual imagery, contribute to the text, ensure meaningful reading, add to understanding and pleasure. It is implied that a very close relationship exists between the text and reading the pictures. The following assumptions are implied as to the relation of pictures to comprehension in reading:

1. That pictures are accepted and used as integral parts of a book's subject matter.
2. That pictures are read as text is read, so as to supply meaning to the text which they accompany or to provide meaning which the text alone cannot supply.
3. That pictures encourage or motivate persons to read books or other materials which they otherwise might not read.

\* Read before the joint meeting of The National Conference on Research in Elementary School English and The American Educational Research Association, St. Louis, Mo. Feb. 25, 1936.

Certainly these assumptions are in line with teachers' philosophy in regard to the values and uses of pictures. Dozens of references could be, but need not be, quoted to show that teachers, particularly of geography, history, and science, count heavily on the assistance of picture material *in general*. As to the *specific* contribution pictures make to reading comprehension, less evidence is available. In fact, pictures seem to be generally valued for their independent or complementary contributions, rather than for what they contribute in connection with a given text.

An experiment tried by the author throws some light on the relation of pictures to reading comprehension. Two hundred and ninety-four children in seven different classes ranging in grade from 6-B to 8-A were given an illustrated booklet on Cork and were asked to read carefully a certain section of the material. The directions were given in this way: "You will read about twelve pages. Read very carefully, being sure not to miss anything on these pages, and when you have finished, you will be asked to answer a list of questions." The test which followed contained 13 questions which the text alone answered and 13 questions which only the pictures answered. As soon as the test was begun it was evident from the expressions of bewilderment, irritation and even indignation, that many pupils thought they were not being fairly treated. The questions were not answered in the booklet, said some. Upon discussing the difficulty, it was found that about 6% of the pupils had not looked at the pictures at all. About 25% said they had looked at some of the pictures for fun when they were through reading. Approximately half of the whole group had looked at the pictures as they came to them in the text. Of course none of the classes had been told directly to study the pictures, but apparently it cannot

safely be assumed that all children in grades six to eight consider pictures an integral, contributing part of reading material, and accord them a careful study of their own free choice.

Neither can much be said for the effective understanding and remembrance of the picture content on the part of those who admitted to an examination of the pictures. On the 13 questions answered by the text, the whole group averaged 9 answers correct, with no appreciable difference between the scores of those who did and those who did not look at the pictures. Of the 13 questions which the pictures answered, those who had looked at the pictures answered correctly a median of 4 points; those who had not looked at the pictures answered correctly a median of 2. Apparently the text gave background sufficient for intelligent guesses.

Some little time later a second picture-reading test was tried with nearly 90 of the sixth grade children, to see how effectively they could answer main point questions answered by the pictures when the pictures and the text were before them. The same booklet on Cork was used and pupils read a short section of the text before beginning the picture-reading test. Then with this as background, they turned successively to the pictures accompanying the text and attempted to answer questions based on the general content of the text but answered specifically only by the pictures. Of 13 such questions, the group answered a median of 8 correctly. If this represents the proportion of comprehension of subject matter added by pictures, they seem to have considerable justification besides their decorativeness.

Still a third experiment with the sixth grade group attempted to find out how much information pupils can summarize for themselves from pictures, in contradistinction to locating specific facts called for. After reading another section of the

booklet for general background, children were asked to summarize from two unrelated pictures the information which the pictures added to what they had learned from the text. For one, 9 different points were listed, with a median of 2 points per child; for the other, 7 different points, with a median of 2 points per child. In other words, those particular sixth grade children tended to see only about 2 items of information in pictures which accompanied and supplemented printed information which they had already read.

Probably no one doubts that these picture-reading skills *can* be developed nor that they have been, in many schools. There are of course numerous studies on the uses of films, slides, and other visual aids. There are also some studies, but fewer, which show how pictures in textbooks are used by readers, and to what effect. For convenience we may consider such studies as there are in three groups: (1) those which relate to the effectiveness of textbook pictures or pictures of textbook type as a means of improving comprehension; (2) those which indicate the relative effectiveness of different types of pictures for learning purposes; and (3) those which show the extent to which the pictures affect children's choices of books.

All the studies have to do with flat pictures, not lantern slides, motion pictures, sound films, or stereographs; all of them are experimental or investigative; all contribute to an understanding of the *relation of pictures to reading*, not just as a means of visual instruction; all (except one) are fairly recent.

The most extensive investigation of the amount of information gained from pictures used in conjunction with text material is reported by Dr. Lewerenz,<sup>1</sup> Assistant Supervisor of Educational Re-

search and Guidance in the Los Angeles City Schools. Three hundred and fifty-nine eighth-grade children in five Los Angeles junior high schools were given booklets on the story of Columbus, which is a part of the regular B-8 course of study. The booklet consisted of eight photographic stills from the film "Columbus," with a brief paragraph of historical description accompanying each picture to provide background. Altogether the booklets were intended to be a self-contained lesson on the story of Columbus. With the booklet was a paragraph of directions for studying the pictures, explaining that the pictures gave information that it would be hard to put into words, and that the test to follow would call for the pictured information.

The test was designed to measure the information which could be derived only from the pictures. For example, some of the yes or no statements on the picture of Queen Isabella deciding to sell her jewels were the following: (1) "The walls of the room were built of stone all of one color." (2) "Figures of lions were carved in Isabella's chair." (3) "It was the style for men to wear jeweled necklaces." The median score on the test was 76.4 for those who used the picture booklets, and 66.7 for the control group which took the test without seeing the pictures. Apparently the pictures added approximately 15% to the users' knowledge of the subject. Furthermore, children of less than average mentality gained as much as or more than those of higher I.Q. Boys appeared to observe pictures more carefully than girls and to make higher scores on the picture test. These results indicate that pictures can be used advantageously with text in order to give background to the text and to add information which the text alone cannot provide.

Another study of the use of pictures as a means of instruction attempted to de-

<sup>1</sup> Lewerenz, Alfred S. "Some Results of a Visual Education Class in Junior High School Social Studies Taught with the Aid of Flat Pictures." *Educational Research Bulletin*, Los Angeles City Schools, October 1929. pp. 4-16.

termine the ability of children to interpret the pictures used in elementary textbooks in geography. For purposes of his experiment Mr. Cropper<sup>2</sup> removed 20 textbook pictures from the texts and mounted them. Assuming that children's questions serve as an index to their ability to understand and interpret pictures, he then asked pupils to propose questions concerning the pictures. Seventy-five per cent of the questions were straight fact questions. After a 7-weeks period of instruction in the use of pictures, a second set of geography textbook pictures was presented for further questions related to the pictures. It was found that the questions which children then asked were divided, 64% on questions of relationship and 36% on facts. The author concludes that the choice of pictures for textbooks should be done with the objectives of the subject and the particular course in mind. The findings seem to indicate also that at present the pictures in textbooks are better than is the usual instruction in their effective use.

These studies having to do with the effectiveness of pictures which accompany text material are supplemented by a limited number of studies of the effectiveness of pictures as a means of learning to read. Bergman and Vreeland<sup>3</sup> of Detroit made a comparison of two methods of teaching beginners to read, in both of which methods pictures were used to give meaning to vocabulary exercises. The two picture methods were not compared with non-picture methods, so from that point of view we cannot discover relative effectiveness of the use of pictures for primary reading instruction. By both picture-methods, however, children showed what

appear to be good gains in vocabulary development.

Another interesting use of pictures-for-reading-background is shown in a study by Miss Waters,<sup>4</sup> called "Pre-reading Experience." In this study Miss Waters attempted to discover what experiences primary reading books were going to demand of her kindergarten children by analyzing primary reading books. Next she investigated which of these experiences were lacking in her pupils, and planned a program of activities for supplying the necessary experiences for guaranteeing meaningful reading. In this program pictures played a significant part.

If pictures are to be included generously in textbooks as at present, and if instruction in the effective use of the pictures is to be encouraged, many questions still remain as to the types of pictures best for learning purposes. Several recent studies shed light on some of these questions. In one of these, Helen Creese<sup>5</sup> examined more than 7000 pictures in 24 geography textbooks, ranging in date of publication from 1880 to 1930, and attempted to classify the pictures as to whether they were high, medium, or low in geographic quality. She reported an encouraging increase in the proportion of pictures of high geographic quality, representing an increasing emphasis on the selection of pictures which show geographic relationships rather than isolated facts. Though this study does not show objectively the relative value of one type of picture as against the other, it is in itself evidence that at least one subject-matter field is defining fairly specifically the type of teaching picture it considers valuable to accompany reading material.

The finish of pictures has been an in-

<sup>2</sup> Cropper, Floyd A. "An Experimental Evaluation of the Ability of Children to Interpret the Pictures Used in Elementary Textbooks in Geography." *Journal of Geography*, March 1935.

<sup>3</sup> Bergman, W. G. and Vreeland, Wendell. "Comparative Achievement in Word Recognition under two Methods of Teaching Beginning Reading." *Elementary School Journal*, 32: 605-616, April 1932.

<sup>4</sup> Waters, Doris. "Pre-reading Experience." *Education*, 54: 308-312, January 1934.

<sup>5</sup> Creese, Helen A. "An Evaluation and Classification of Pictures used in Geography Texts from 1880 to 1930." *University of Pittsburgh Bulletin*, November 15, 1933. pp. 356-57.



teresting field for experimentation. For example, Mr. MacLean,<sup>6</sup> found that color pictures are superior in portraying distance, in enhancing contrasts, and in conveying the impression of sunlight and warmth, but that color seems to have less value when the purpose of the picture is to show architectural and engineering detail, and that color may be actually harmful in concentrating the observer's attention on portions of the illustration. Dr. Lewerenz,<sup>7</sup> in his study previously reported, had half of his pictures sharp and clear, revealing the maximum of detail. The other half were given a soft diffused effect more in the order of an oil painting. The test results showed no superiority for either type; apparently either sharp or soft finish may in general be used with nearly equal educational effect. We may have strong convictions as to the desirability of sharp, clear detail in pictures to be used for study purposes, but these studies do not justify such convictions.

As part of an evaluation of textbooks in geography for elementary grades, Melbo and Waterman<sup>8</sup> of the Oakland, California, public schools and the California State Department of Education, respectively, analyzed the numbers, sizes, types, quality, and up-to-dateness of the pictures in eight series of geographies. From this they analyzed also the purposes, or study uses of the pictures. Some of the findings which bear directly on the relation of pictures to reading comprehension may be summarized: (1) From 20 to 25% of the textbook content is given over to pictures, but on the whole, there is too large a proportion of cultural pictures and too small a proportion of cultural-natural pictures; (2) for the

most part, illustrations have little or no relation to the fundamental organization of the textual material; (3) many of the pictures in each book are concerned with relatively insignificant geographic relationships. In concluding their report the authors summarize interestingly some of the things we do *not* know about pictures that are to be used as textbook material, such as optimum size, most desirable frequency of occurrence, proportion of pictures and text, and the desirable balance of different subject-matter types of pictures. Certainly these unknowns offer an interesting and profitable field for study.

As to whether pictures encourage or motivate the reading of material which otherwise might not be selected, there have been numerous studies. Beginning with Dr. Bamberger's<sup>9</sup> study of the effect of the physical make-up of a book upon children's selection and going on through several others<sup>10</sup> made in the last few years it seems evident that if pictures are to serve as motivation for reading they must be selected with the following points in mind:

1. Children like books that have at least a quarter of the book space given to pictures.
2. Children like full page or fairly large pictures.
3. Children prefer strong colors.
4. Bold central groups with few but striking details are better than many details.
5. Realistic pictures are preferable to conventionalized pictures.
6. Action, humor, and a story are favorite picture types.

<sup>9</sup> Bamberger, Florence E. *The Effect of the Physical Make-up of a Book upon Children's Selection*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1922. p. 84.

<sup>10</sup> Freeman, G. LaVerne and Freeman, Ruth Sunderlin. *The Child and his Picture Book*. Chicago, Northwestern University Press, 1933.

Morrison, Jeanette G. *Children's Preferences for Pictures*. University of Chicago Press, 1935. p. 50.

Mellinger, Bonnie. "Children's Interests in Pictures." *Teachers College Contributions to Education*. No. 516. 1932.

Martin, Helen. "Children's Preferences in Book Illustration." *Western Reserve University Bulletin*, July 15, 1931.

<sup>6</sup> MacLean, W. P. "A Comparison of Colored and Un-colored Pictures." *Educational Screen*, 9: 196-199. September 1930.

<sup>7</sup> Lewerenz, Alfred S. *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Melbo, Irving R. and Waterman, Ivan R. "Pictures in Geography Textbooks." *Elementary School Journal*, 36: 362-365, January 1936.

7. Young children like a broader range of picture subject matter than they usually receive.
8. Young children do not care especially for pictures of child activities.
9. Older children like pictures related to in-school and informational interests.

At present much attention is devoted in textbooks to setting the problem for each chapter, and to securing effective motivation for study. It would be interesting to know to what extent well selected, well placed, and well captioned pictures can provide the desired motivating effect.

✓ In conclusion it may be said that no one appears to doubt the validity of the assumption that pictures in textbooks supply background and provide vicarious experience which add to the understanding of the textual material. Some evidence is available as to the conditions under which this is actually operative,

but additional evidence is needed to guide authors and publishers in the selection and arrangement of pictures, and to assist teachers in educating children to use pictures, and to use them effectively.

Only a few of the questions to which we do not know the answers are the following:

1. What proportion of the space in books for school use can profitably be devoted to pictures? Is space more profitably used as text?
2. If pictures are used, where should they be placed in relation to related subject matter?
3. Which is better—a few large carefully chosen illustrations of major importance, or many smaller ones?
4. Should (or could) the text or the caption provide for effective reading of the picture?
5. What types of pictures are there from the standpoint of teaching content and teaching effectiveness?

# The Book Written with a Purpose\*

MARY AVIS CUTLER

*Children's Librarian, Madison Branch Library, Lakewood, Ohio*

But the children I most admire  
Are like every one else:  
They enjoy best  
The books that were not  
Too obviously  
Intended for them.

Perhaps everything  
Deliberately written for a special audience  
Is second-rate.<sup>1</sup>

THESE nine brief lines of Christopher Morley's sum up the whole subject so nicely that an article is almost superfluous. Indeed the phrase, "Too obviously intended for them," and the intimation that children are people are the very themes that I should like to develop at greater length and in prose.

The book written with a purpose is as old as children's literature itself. The juvenile literature of early times was filled with moral lessons, sermons in story form, in which naughty boys and girls were punished with shocking severity, and the good rewarded with early death and the joys of heaven. These stories survive today, with the exception of Maria Edgeworth's *Tales*, and one or two others, merely as literary curiosities. But the belief that the child can be painlessly instructed by means of information disguised as fiction still, unhappily, persists. It is true that times have changed and that we now have the stories of little birds and flowers and pieces of coal; life in other lands, and events of history, instead of moral instruction, but the essen-

tial idea has not changed since the days of *Eric*, or *Little by Little* and *Rosamund and the Purple Jar*.

Nobody knows now what the boys and girls of the pinafore and pantalette era really thought of their literary fare. It is possible that they were impressed and improved by what they read, but it is much more probable that the didactic parts were skipped and the stories read and enjoyed for the adventure and drama and pathos within their drab covers. But it is clearly evident to a children's librarian that the children of today are irritated and bored by having their information presented to them in watered and sweetened form. They are grateful to the author who talks to them instead of talking down to them, who addresses them as intelligent people, without the maddening "And now, dear little children, Uncle Oswald will tell you all about the so and so" approach that certain authors consider essential.

Perhaps the greatest sinners in this respect are the writers of scientific books for children. As if the very facts of nature are not exciting and dramatic enough in themselves these earnest authors reduce their subjects to sentimental twaddle, with the mistaken idea that in doing so they are making themselves comprehensible to children.

There is one device that is extremely popular with writers of this type—the use of the benevolent, omniscient uncle and his nephew and niece, almost invariably named Bobby and Betty. The names of the uncles may vary, but they

\* This paper was prepared under the direction of the Book Evaluation Committee of the Children's Librarians' Section of the American Library Association, Miss Gladys English, Chairman.

<sup>1</sup> From the *Saturday Review of Literature*, November 18, 1933. Used here with permission.

have certain characteristics in common. They have unlimited time for wandering about the fields and forests with their young relatives, a fund of wide if somewhat superficial knowledge of natural science, and a heavily playful manner that would sicken any child less spineless than Bobby and Betty. Just try giving one of these Uncle-Bobby-Betty books to the nine-year old boy who is making a floor talk on the life and habits of the earthworm at school the next day. The intelligent child will be annoyed by the superfluous story and will demand something that has only facts, while the stupid one will be bewildered and confused by the frills. He, too, wants facts presented clearly and concisely—where the earthworm lives, what it eats, and whether it is a help or a hindrance to the farmer.

The writers of the fictionized fact school have a spokesman in Mr. Thornton W. Burgess, who says in the preface to *The Burgess Bird Book for Children*, "This book was written to supply a definite need. . . . Its primary purpose is to interest the little child in, and to make him acquainted with, those feathered friends he is most likely to see. Because there is no method of approach to the child mind equal to the story, this method of conveying information has been adopted. . . . It is intended to be at once a story book and an authoritative handbook." The book itself begins in an informal, chatty manner, designed to put the young reader at his ease. "Lipperty-lipperty-lip scampered Peter Rabbit behind the tumble-down stone wall along one side of the old orchard. It was early in the morning, very early in the morning. In fact, jolly, bright Mr. Sun had hardly begun his daily climb up in the blue, blue sky."

One can see by reading the preface that Mr. Burgess is able to write literate, dignified, sensible English. But when he begins his story he feels it necessary to

sacrifice dignity and beauty of style to an intolerably arch playfulness. As for the information conveyed in the book, it is almost over-shadowed by the story elements. Peter Rabbit and his friends the birds have so many human characteristics that their real natures are almost forgotten by the reader. The child reading for pleasure takes the whole thing as a story, while the child looking for information is forced to wade through paragraphs of vapid dialogue before he finds out how wrens build their nests or why birds go south in winter.

I do not question in the least Mr. Burgess' love for children and for nature, or his sincerity in writing, but I do think he has been misled about what children really like. The popularity of the nature stories of Alice Crew Gall and Fleming H. Crew show that it is possible to combine high literary merit with scientific accuracy without sacrificing popularity. Their animals and birds are always and simply animals and birds. Information is there, a great deal of information, but it is presented with distinction and charm. The authors do not insult the intelligence of the child by writing down to what they suppose to be his level. Instead, they follow admirably the advice of Anatole France who said, "When you are writing for children, do not assume a style for the occasion. Think your best and write your best. Let the whole thing live; let there be plenty of breadth and power. That is the one secret of pleasing your readers."

W. Maxwell Reed in *The Earth for Sam*, *The Stars for Sam* and *The Sea for Sam*, in spite of a rather unfortunate choice of titles, writes in a sprightly but completely natural style, with no trace of hypothetical head patting; and La Monte and Welsh, in their *Vanishing Wilderness*, have proved that animals can be interesting with benefit of story.

The two schools of thought are not



represented in the field of science alone. The same criticisms can be applied to books of travel, history and art. The garrulous uncle and his young relatives on ships and trains and in foreign lands can be contrasted with the more matter-of-fact travelers of H. B. Lent's *Full Steam Ahead*, William Pryor's *Steamship Book*, Anne Merriman Peck's *Roundabout America*, and others. V. M. Hillyer's *Child's History of Art* has the patronizing and facetious tone that is lacking in *All the Ways of Building*, the excellent history of architecture by Louise Lamprey. And the *Child's History of the World* by the same author is written down with a condescension that Hendrik Van Loon, in his *Story of Mankind*, skillfully avoids.

One might think that the book written with a purpose is to be found only in non-fiction. But this, unfortunately, is not the case. Although the story with a moral is almost extinct, the book written with a purpose still exists in fiction. It is usually found in books about children of other lands. I am no rabid nationalist. As a child I read and reread *Heidi*, until the mountains and people and spirit of Switzerland became a part of my own experience. When I read and wept over *Castle Blair* the romance and tragedy and wild beauty of Ireland lived before me. And the child who has not lived in Holland as he pored over *Hans Brinker* has been cheated out of a delightful experience. For younger children *A Day on Skates*, by Hilda Van Stockum, published last year, also reproduces in the freshest, most delightful manner imaginable the sights and sounds and people of this appealing country.

These beloved classics have little in common with the lifeless uninspired books that are all too often bought for young relatives by fond aunts and grandmothers, and alas, by librarians and teachers, beguiled by an attractive format

and the need for material on a certain country. We have all seen these made-to-order stories, with their puppet characters, their pasteboard settings and uninspired text. *Peter and Gretchen of Old Nuremberg*, by B. M. Jones, a recent Junior Literary Guild selection, is a good example of books of this type. It is physically attractive, with charming pastel illustrations, good paper and large, clear print. But I am quite sure that if it had been called "Peter and Gertrude of Old Terre Haute," and the carefully inserted bits of quaintness and local color had been absent, it would never have been chosen by the Guild. Peter and Gretchen are no more German than the little boy and girl next door, and the Nuremberg of the story no more real than a set of picture post cards. Compare this bloodless little story with *Emil and the Detectives* by Erich Kastner in Miss May Massee's lively translation. Thanks to the art of author and translator Emil and his friends are real, living, German children.

Another uninspired story of a foreign country is *A Boy of Poland*, by Marian King. This book has much valuable material on the life and customs and traditions of Poland. If the author had been content to publish it as a travel book it would have been quite as useful to schools and libraries and it would have escaped the criticism it deserves as a work of fiction. The material is there, carefully, methodically presented, but the story with which it is garnished is so feeble, the characters so utterly un-Polish, that we have a hybrid that is neither good fiction nor good non-fiction.

This attempt to acquaint our children with the lives of their contemporaries in other parts of the world is admirable in itself, but there can be little advantage in stuffing young readers with dull material disguised as a story. When the material is inaccurate as well as lifeless the lowest form of the book written with a

purpose has been found. A recent example of this sort, such a horrible example that it shall be nameless, is the story of a Mississippi River waif, a modern Huckleberry Finn. The hero, who has a noble nature and a vocabulary surprisingly free from local slang, is adopted by a planter whose "ranch" beside the river rather surprisingly accommodates cowboys, bucking broncos, cotton, corn, and oranges. At the age of eighteen this paragon is last seen piloting a large steamboat up the river during a flood, carrying many passengers, much cargo and towing three barges.

Any one who has lived near one of our great rivers will be filled with horrified incredulity as he reads. But I am sure that many a teacher and librarian, to whom life on the Mississippi is completely unfamiliar, has bought this book and is using it without question, delighted with its moderate price, excellent paper, and type, and pictures by one of the country's leading illustrators of children's books.

Although this is an extreme example it shows clearly that in selecting books for children we must look not only for literary merit but for accuracy. The author who writes spontaneously, for love of children and with a deep interest in his subject, can hardly help writing honestly and well. It is the author-with-a-purpose, the writer who says to himself, "The fifth and sixth graders in this country need to know more about Yugoslavia, or the Panama Canal, or the raising of cotton; I will write a story about it for them," who is most likely to fall into the pitfalls mentioned above.

I am not so smugly intolerant as to condemn all books that are not written in the white heat of inspired genius. After all, great books and great authors are rare, and if we admitted only classics to our shelves our collections would be small indeed. But I do feel that teachers

and librarians and parents must have definite standards in choosing books for children. There is no place in children's literature for condescension, sentimentality, sloppy, indifferent writing, or inaccuracy. Most children are too intelligent to be taken in by the "books obviously intended for them," the book of fact disguised as fiction, or the made-to-order story.

All of us know that the adult whose manner is kittenish or patronizing is much less successful with children than the rare person who treats them as courteously and matter-of-factly as if they too, were adult. If this is true in school and in social life it is just as true in literature. Anatole France knew it. Christopher Morley wrote a poem about it. And nearly all of us realize that children are people, that they deserve the best that writers and illustrators can do, and that schools and libraries can provide.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Burgess, T. W. *The Burgess Bird Book for Children*. Little
- Dodge, M. M. *Hans Brinker*. Scribners
- Edgeworth, Maria. *Tales*. Stokes
- Gall, A. C. and Crew, F. H. *Wagtail*. Oxford
- Gall, A. C. and Crew, F. H. *Ringtail*. Oxford
- Gall, A. C. and Crew, F. H. *Flat Tail*. Oxford
- Hillyer, V. M. *Child's History of Art*. Appleton
- Hillyer, V. M. *Child's History of the World*. Appleton
- Jones, V. M. *Peter and Gretchen of Old Nuremberg*. Whitman
- Kastner, Erich. *Emil and the Detectives*. Doubleday
- King, Marian. *A Boy of Poland*. Whitman
- La Monte, F. R. and Welch, M. H. *Vanishing Wilderness*. Liveright
- Lamprey, Louise. *All the Ways of Building*. Macmillan
- Lent, H. B. *Full Steam Ahead*. Macmillan
- Peck, A. M. and Johnson, Enid. *Roundabout America*. Harper
- Pryor, William. *The Steamship Book*. Harcourt
- Reed, W. M. *The Earth for Sam*. Harcourt
- Reed, W. M. *The Stars for Sam*. Harcourt
- Reed, W. M. *The Sea for Sam*. Harcourt
- Shaw, F. L. *Castle Blair*. Little
- Spyri, Johanna. *Heidi*. Ginn
- Van Loon, H. W. *Story of Mankind*. Boni
- Van Stockum, Hilda. *A Day on Skates*. Harper

# Contemporary Poetry for Children

WALTER BARNES

*School of Education, New York University*

(Continued from February)

EDITOR'S NOTE: In the first installment, which appeared in the January issue, Dr. Barnes developed the thesis, "Good poetry for children is good poetry which is good for children." In the February number, in this, and in subsequent installments, he considers the children's verse of various present-day authors.

## ROSE FYLEMAN

If from all of Rose Fyleman's books of verse for children,<sup>1</sup> one could cull the authentic poetry, the truly begotten, patiently nurtured, and competently dressed poetry, one could make a charming, plump little volume.

And this volume would be a-flutter and a-flaunt with fairies. For it is as a poet of fairy-land that Miss Fyleman has made her strongest appeal to children and her most distinctive contribution to children's poetry. Fairies, according to Miss Fyleman, are everywhere. The smoke from chimneys and the noise in the chimneys are made by fairies "having such a joke"; one can see fairies in the fountain or while one is looking out of the window at night, or while one is ill in bed, or of a summer morning while walking, or beneath the apple tree, or all about the daphne bush, or in the hay field; one can see them in Smith Square, Westminster, or while riding in a motorbus on Oxford Street. Too many

fairies! Miss Fyleman should be aware that only at certain times and in certain spots and in certain moods is one permitted to watch the doings of the fairy people. One of her poems begins:

Some days are fairy days, the minute that  
you wake

You have a magic feeling that you never  
could mistake.

Of course. Some days are fairy days—though perhaps it would be truer to say "some moments are fairy moments." Fairies, as all authorities agree, are shy creatures, shy and temperamental, and they disclose themselves only at the fitting time, under auspicious circumstances, to the human being appointed, or anointed, as witness. It is almost as silly to believe in so many fairies as not to believe in fairies at all.

Too many fairies! Moreover, nearly all of Miss Fyleman's fairies belong to the same tribe. They have no individualization, hence no convincingness, no reality. Pretty, dainty, sweet, gauze-like creatures, fluttering like butterflies, swarming like bees, omnipresent, eternally charming and beneficent—this is literary pretense. I believe that Miss Fyleman does not believe in all her fairies!

I believe in some of them. I believe in the ones that appear in "The Fairy Green," in "The Singing Fairy," in "Dunsley Glen," in "Fairies in the Malverns," in "White Magic," in "At

<sup>1</sup> Selections from *The Fairy Green*, copyright 1923 by Doubleday, Doran, and from *Fairies and Chimneys*, copyright 1920 by Doubleday, Doran, are given here by special permission of the publishers.

Dawn," in "Fairy Music," in "The Fairy Flute," in "The Island," and in a few others. In these poems the mood and atmosphere are appropriate, the idea is serious and honest, the expression fervent and ingenuous; and as a consequence the reader is beguiled into collusion with the author, is persuaded into "that willing suspension of disbelief," which, according to Coleridge, "constitutes poetic faith." Here is the first stanza of "The Island."

I know an island in a lake,  
Green upon waters grey;  
It has a strange enchanted air.  
I hear the fairies singing there  
When I go by that way.

And here the first stanza of "Dunsley Glen":

There is no road to Dunsley Glen  
I should not know the way again  
Because the fairies took me there,  
Down by a little rocky stair—  
A little stair all twists and turns,  
Half hidden by the spreading ferns.

Miss Fyleman, it is evident, has had commerce with fairies, many direct and memorable experiences with them, and she is possessed of much lore about them. Here is a bit of truth-telling (opening lines in "White Magic").

Blind folk see the fairies,  
Oh, better far than we,  
Who miss the shining of their wings  
Because our eyes are filled with things  
We do not wish to see.

And here is another, expressed in what is perhaps Miss Fyleman's most widely known poem. I quote only the first stanza.

The fairies have never a penny to spend,  
They haven't a thing put by,  
But theirs is the dower of bird and of flower  
And theirs are the earth and the sky,  
And though you should live in a palace of gold  
Or sleep in a dried-up ditch,  
You could never be poor as the fairies are,  
And never as rich.

Here one receives an impact and perceives an import; the babyish, pseudo-whimsical, quasi-literal statements concerning figments of the fancy have given way to hints of luminous meanings, wherein the fairies are described as incarnations of spiritual, cosmic forces and presences. Miss Fyleman is even more explicit in the last stanza of "Fairy Music."

Every dream that mortals dream, sleeping  
or awake,  
Every lovely fragile hope—these the fairies  
take,  
Delicately fashion them and give them  
back again  
In tender, limpid melodies that charm the  
hearts of men.

Perhaps this is too explicit. No one wants fairies labeled as symbols or personifications. But neither can one have respect for or belief in the conventional puppets and pretty-pretty poppets which are galvanized into the semblance of existence in so many of Miss Fyleman's books. A dozen or two of her fairy poems have the intense reality and convincing expression that gives proof of the rare, high moment of experience and insight; the others are manufactured, machine-made.

Miss Fyleman has written frequently on the familiar themes and from the traditional points of view of verses for children, much of it up to the standard of such verses. But it is as a poet of fairyland and fairy-lore that she must be judged. I could wish that she had command of a larger repertoire of rhythms and musical effects and particularly that she would quit writing in the monotonous, pitter-patter tempo of a metronome; and I could wish also that she had command of a richer phrasal power. I think she is not often a first-rate lyric poet, with theme and mood informed by fervent emotion and lifted high on wings of song.



## ELEANOR FARJEON

Capable maker of hundreds of verses for children, Eleanor Farjeon<sup>2</sup> occasionally creates poems characterized by high seriousness, graceful beauty, and finished workmanship.

Miss Farjeon has not extended greatly the boundaries of children's poetry. She writes understandingly and sometimes glowingly of the thoughts, fancies, and adventures of boys and girls indoors and out, their "alarms and excursions." But this has been done many times, and done better. Miss Farjeon's boys and girls are good-natured children, natural enough but often commonplace, and their experiences and reflections are frequently pretty close to those of the average youngster. Surely the child who is the poet's spokesman and "familiar" must be himself a poet, "apprehensive, quick, forgetive," and eloquent in intuitive wisdom. Now and then, of course, Miss Farjeon's children are genuine poets; otherwise they would find no place in this study. The title poem of *Over the Garden Wall*<sup>2</sup> has beauty and both mystery and meaning, despite its occasional prosaic phrases.

Over the garden wall  
Where unseen children play,  
Somebody threw a ball  
One fine summer day,  
I caught it as it came  
Straight from the hand unknown  
Playing a happy game  
It would not play alone.

A pretty ball with bands  
Of gold and stars of blue;  
I turned it in my hands  
And wondered, then I threw  
Over the garden wall  
Again the treasure round—  
And somebody caught the ball  
With a laughing sound.

<sup>2</sup> Poems by Miss Farjeon are quoted here by special permission of the publishers, Frederick A. Stokes Company. They are taken from the volumes entitled *Joan's Door* (1927), *Come Christmas* (1928), and *Over the Garden Wall* (1933).

And here is pretty fancy and symmetrical architecture.

## THE SMOKE

Over there  
Is a little house,  
Quiet as a mouse,  
Or an empty hive,  
Or as death.

But up in the air  
From the chimney-poke  
Goes the gentle smoke,  
And I know that the house is alive,  
I can see its breath.

And here a child-poet's lament for the evanescence of beauty:

## THE BONFIRE

This cloud of smoke in other hours  
Was leaves and grass, green twigs and flowers,  
This bitter-sweet dead smell that blows  
Was once the breathing of the rose.  
Shapeless the forms of petals fair  
And slender leaves melt in the air,  
And in a scent she never knew  
In life, the rose departeth too.

I find genuine, if not lofty poetry in "Blind Alley," "After Rain," "The Hills over the Water," and "Morning Glory." Miss Farjeon's poems of fairies and the supernatural have the shadowy elusiveness and yet convincing illusion one desires in literature of this type. This is true of "City-under-Water," of "The Tale of Lilla" (a fine poem, though too long), in "Nearly" (which gives you a catch in your throat), and in "The Kerry Loon," which begins

As I sat on the Hills of Kerry  
I saw a wee green Loon  
Sit drinking under a blackthorn bush  
From the horn of this month's moon.

Miss Farjeon is perhaps at her best in poems of this kind, though here also she is gleaned in fields which have been thoroughly reaped by others. But in her poems about Christmas she has done something distinctive and genuinely con-

tributive. The poems on this theme which charmed me most are: "Six Green Singers," "The Mummers," "The Children's Carol," "The Shepherd and the King," "Shall I to the Byre Go Down?" and "A Manger Song," which latter I quote.

Whence got ye your soft, soft eyes of the mother, O  
soft-eyed cow?

We saw the Mother of mothers bring forth, and  
that was how.

We sheltered her that was shelterless for a little  
while,

We watched the milking Babe at her breast, and we  
saw her smile.

Even as she lay upon straw, and even as we  
Took her sleep in the dark of the manger unfret-  
fully,

And when the dawn of the strange new star dis-  
covered her thus,

The ray that was destined for her and for Him fell  
also on us;

The light passed into her eyes and ours, and full  
in its flood

We were first to behold the first mothering look of  
the Mother of God.

Certainly Eleanor Farjeon has established a claim upon our affections and our admiration and those of children. One could discard from her books much that is made-to-order, uninspired, and unfinished, and yet have a considerable group of good lyrics, strong in impact, rich in import, adequate in technique, and interesting to children.

### MONICA SHANNON

Much close observation of California scenes and children, a goodly variety of themes, moods, and techniques, a well-balanced mixture of sensibility, sense, and nonsense, have entered into the making of Monica Shannon's book of verses for children.<sup>3</sup>

"Gallop, Gallop to a Rhyme" has a rollicking metre and a suggestion of an inner meaning; "Three Old Cattlemen" has a rattling jingle and a spice of gro-

tesqueness, "Deaf to Applause" has bland seriousness ending in a mock-serious twist à la Hilaire Belloc.

Miss Shannon has vigorous phrasal power. Here, for example, is the first stanza of "Moths":

My lamp is but a little lamp  
And yet, the moths it brings  
With scarlet dress and sprightliness  
And twilight on their wings.

### And here part of "Garden Guests":

My shyer friends, my gayer guests—  
House finches in their gaudy vests.  
A long white string to mark their nests,  
Lest, absent-minded, they should fly  
Into a nest where robins lie,  
And have some bee roll up his eyes  
In pained and practical surprise,  
What is a garden without these?  
The tree toads squat on graying knees,  
In crumpled clothes with baggy knees.

—There is a suggestion of Emily Dickinson there.

I prefer Miss Shannon in those poems in which nonsense and meaning are mixed together. In the following the topsy-turvy grotesquerie (reminiscent of "High diddle diddle" and other folk jingles) rises almost abruptly into a "peak of Darien":

When Kings are punching cattle,  
And cowboys sit on thrones  
And cats shave off their whiskers,  
And dogs go selling bones,  
Then I shall always be on time  
And never lose a thing,  
And be so busy doing that,  
I'll have no time to sing,  
No time to greet God's little moon  
Or coax a cricket in  
To warm his legs before my fire  
And chirp about some small desire.

Here is indeed a rising above what Hazlitt calls the "crude circumstantial of the subject." But it is probable that this mercurial shifting of moods is alien to the one-ideal nature of children. For children like their poetry "straight" and undiluted, either flesh or fowl or good red herring. I suspect that Miss Shannon's

<sup>3</sup> *Goose Grass Rhymes*, Copyright, 1930, by Doubleday, Doran. Used here by special permission of the publishers.

# Script-Print and Beginning Reading and Spelling\*

PRUDENCE CUTRIGHT

*Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Minneapolis, Minnesota*

**M**Y PURPOSE is to present a brief review of the case of manuscript writing versus cursive or script writing as a means of facilitating the development of the ability to read and the ability to write on the part of beginners.

Educators who are particularly interested in the primary grades are constantly concerned with the question of teaching methods and materials which will facilitate the development of satisfactory skills in reading and writing, two of the most vital and necessary tools of learning. It is our custom to plan on the development of these two tools simultaneously since they are highly interdependent.

It is quite obvious from the records of failure to achieve promotion at the end of the first grade that at least a large percentage of the children in those schools that adhere to the grade per year plan, are not meeting with a high degree of success in learning how to read. The practice of basing promotions from the first to the second grade on the child's progress in learning to read still persists in the majority of public school systems. Records show that about 16% of all first grade children fail to make their promotion and there is but little doubt that a large part of this failure is due to lack of success in reading.

Not only do failures reveal a lack of success in teaching children to read, but achievement tests in reading show that

the reading ability of about 10% of the children is not on a level with their intellectual abilities.

We are vitally concerned with ways and means of preventing failure and of facilitating this matter of learning to read. Many preventive and remedial measures have been suggested, but we have all gone far enough in our experimental work to know both preventive and remedial measures are quite individual in nature. This individual nature of preventive and remedial measures prevents our being too enthusiastic about any single measure as an aid to all children.

Many claims have been made for manuscript writing. Just a few of these are: (1) It is easier to learn. (2) It is more rhythmical to write. (3) It can be written as rapidly as cursive. (4) It is more legible and, therefore, more easily read. (5) It facilitates the learning of reading and of spelling. (6) It satisfies the young child's desire to write.

Since manuscript writing was introduced in this country about 1920, investigators have been very busy checking these claims. The evidence in the case of reading in relation to manuscript writing is considerable and the findings are so consistent that it demands the attention of every individual interested in helping young children learn to read. Long and Mayer<sup>1</sup> reported a study in 1931 which compared the progress of two groups of 500 children, each taught to read through

\* Read before the joint session of The National Conference on Research in Elementary School English and The American Educational Research Association, February 25, 1936, St. Louis, Mo.

<sup>1</sup> Long, Howard H. and Mayer, Willa C. "Printing versus Cursive Writing in Beginning Reading Instruction." *Journal of Educational Research*, 24:350-55; December, 1931.

the use of print and cursive respectively. The print or manuscript writing proved much more effective in teaching children to read print.

Voorhis'<sup>2</sup> study, also published in 1931, compared the relative merits of manuscript and cursive in first grade classes and found that the children taught manuscript were distinctly superior in ability to read. Not only did Voorhis find that manuscript facilitated the reading of dull children but she found it superior to cursive on each of five mental level groups which she studied.

A study made in 1935 in Minneapolis by Gertrude Drohan, principal of the Cleveland School, showed 58% of a group of 2-B pupils who had been taught only manuscript achieved a significantly higher score on the Metropolitan Reading Test than did the matched cases who had been taught only cursive. This 58% of the manuscript group had an average reading level 6 months in advance of the cursive group. In the 2-A grade, Miss Drohan found 52% of the 142 pupils who had been taught manuscript not only achieved higher reading scores but read on a level 6½ months in advance of their matched cases in a cursive group. She found, quite as Voorhis found, that manuscript aided not only dull children, but also that it greatly speeded the task of learning to read for children in the upper quartile in intelligence.

The evidence in the case of manuscript writing in relation to reading is about as conclusive as anything to be found in the field of educational research. There seem to be no studies of any weight which would discredit the statement *that manuscript writing is a distinct aid to young children who are learning to read print.*

The major part of the evidence which I have presented has been before elementary school teachers, principals, and

supervisors for a number of years. Public school systems are very slow in introducing manuscript writing. Again I am indebted to Miss Drohan for evidence. Miss Drohan, in a questionnaire investigation of the prevalence of manuscript in public schools, found only 37% of the 278 school systems responding to her questionnaire taught manuscript. All of us engaged in public school work can analyze the situation to find the elements that are holding us back. They are: entrenched systems of handwriting, teachers trained to teach cursive only, and a conservative public shy of anything in education which resembles an innovation. There are distinct signs of a changing attitude toward manuscript. We have some of the leading handwriting experts and handwriting supervisors who are not only showing an interest, but are developing teaching materials; teacher training institutions are training their students to teach manuscript writing and parent-teacher clubs are discussing the value of manuscript writing.

The claim is made that manuscript satisfies a child's desire to write and facilitates the learning of spelling. As yet very little evidence is available on either of these points.

Last year Minneapolis conducted a study of the comparative effect of cursive and manuscript writing on second grade children's ability to spell and on the spread of their vocabularies in written composition. The 2-B children in the schools where only cursive writing was used and the 2-B children in eight schools where only manuscript was used were made the subjects of the study. These children were given group intelligence tests. Later they were asked to write a short composition under controlled conditions.

The schools used were located in highly similar socio-economic districts and the children had had about the same quality

<sup>2</sup> Voorhis, Thelma G. *Merits of Cursive and Manuscript Writing*. Lincoln School Research Studies. Teachers College, Columbia University, 1931. p. 58.



of teaching. The children in the schools using cursive were matched with those using print on the bases of sex, intelligence, and chronological age. When the matchings were completed there were 14 matched groups of girls. These matched groups included 56 girls from cursive schools, and 76 from print schools. In each group, the girls in the cursive schools were matched with the girls in manuscript schools on the bases of intelligence and chronological age. Thus in the first group there were 2 girls from cursive schools and 3 from manuscript schools, all having I.Q.'s between 120 and 125 and chronological ages between 7 years and 7 years 5 months. The other 13 groups of girls were similarly matched.

There were 15 groups of boys, including 52 from cursive schools and 65 from manuscript schools. They were matched in the same way as were the girls. The children from manuscript schools and those from cursive schools were compared (1) as to the number of different words written in their composition (illegible and misspelled words as well as correctly spelled words were counted) and (2) as to the number of words spelled correctly.

When compared as to the number of different words written, it was found that in 9 out of the 14 matched groups of girls, the girls in manuscript schools had a higher average number of different words than did the girls in cursive schools. In the boys' groups, in 10 out of the 15 groups the boys in manuscript schools had a higher average of different words than did the boys in cursive schools and in one group the average number of different words was the same. If the ability to write a larger number of words is an indication that a form of writing aids in satisfying a desire for expression, then it would seem that children who are taught manuscript have a better tool than have those who are taught cursive.

When compared as to the number of misspellings, in 8 of the 14 groupings of girls, the girls in the manuscript schools misspelled a smaller average number of words than did their matched groups in cursive schools, and in one matching the average number of misspellings was the same for both groups.

In the matchings of boys, the difference in the spelling of children in the cursive and manuscript schools was even more decidedly in favor of the manuscript writing. In 11 out of the 15 matchings of boys, the boys in manuscript schools misspelled a smaller average number of words than did the boys in cursive schools.

While this study of the spread of vocabulary and of spelling ability in relation to manuscript and cursive writing is not of sufficient scope to permit the drawing of any conclusions, the trend is so much in favor of manuscript as to suggest certain comments.

First, children who begin their writing experience with print seem to write more freely, that is, use a larger number of different words than do children who begin with the cursive form of writing.

Second, children who begin their school writing experiences with print seem to spell a larger number of words correctly than do children who begin with cursive writing.

Supervisors and classroom teachers frequently ask those engaged in research this question: What are the findings of research which are sufficiently well established to justify me in putting them into practice?

From evidence reviewed, we would seem justified in introducing manuscript in the primary grades for all pupils because it is a distinct aid in learning to read. In the very excellent bulletin entitled "Better Reading Instruction" issued last November by the Research Division of the National Education Association we

# Poetry as an Integrating Force\*

ODEYNE GILLETT

*Public Schools, Ann Arbor, Michigan*

THIS IS an account of a pre-writing experience, rather on the receiving than the producing end of writing, and it deals with by-products almost more than with the initial purpose of the teaching. It deals, as a matter of fact, with a small group of children who had reached the latter part of the sixth grade and the middle of the semester before I met them. They were an unusual group, in that many of them were handicapped as to the reading skills necessary to their level of interest. They were also unusual, in that they had developed a spirit of indifference, almost of defiance to interest, due to some happening or set of circumstances in their past. Lacking interest, they had begun to take their enjoyment from watching every chance to make fun of each other, other children, and teachers. They were definitely unkind in their thoughtlessness of the effect of this on the victim. They had become self-centered and unable to think in terms of the other fellow's viewpoint. Anyone who did careful work came in for ridicule. Poetry was something that little children and sissies enjoyed, and, even in extreme cases, wrote. But not for them. They had tried it. It bored them, as did most things and people. Of course, much of this was pose, but backed by the force of group opinion, it was a strong and secure pose. By this force, indifference and direct unkindness, they had made a change in teachers necessary. This was the group I met.

To be sure, they could have been brought back into line by exacting obedience and punishing discourtesy. They could have been held to a level of achieve-

ment on set tasks, but conformity would not have solved their problem. As I saw it, it was a matter of changing their whole emotional set. Before anything creative could be done, they had to be taken outside the wall they had erected around themselves. In an attempt to do this, I felt that ordinary subject matter would not do. I had to separate their work from any name-tags toward which they had a negative attitude. I needed to find a challenging interest, and I must find it in them. I had to help them choose something that could be done in a brief space of time, which would send them to junior high school with a record of a high level of thinking and work. I say, "I had to find" and "I had to choose" because this was a case where presentation and stimulation had to come from me.

The subject around which their study had centered was the question of how America makes its living, a subject which is generally fascinating material to an ordinary group. This topic carried them into American industries, the production of food, commerce and distribution, and the various service professions with all of the branches of each type depending on all of the others. Steel production had been a special field of research.

In a discussion of the life, wages and working conditions of the various occupations, they could not see why the workers were willing to go on doing such work. With their typical response, they thought that even the easiest work would be boring, and the others would be nothing if not distasteful. It occurred to me that this was my cue. Why not, by actually answering a question that was typical of their attitude? So I decided to focus our

\* Read before the National Council of Teachers of English, Denver, Colorado, July, 1935.

study on answering their question, "How do these workers really feel about their jobs and how can we find out?"

In most cases the most colorful method of attack on such a question is a first-hand experience, an excursion, interviews, letters, or any such vital ways of finding information and bringing it in. Our community, however, is not an industrial one. It is largely academic. It does not present a good cross-section of working America. As a matter of fact, we had gone to the university metallurgy laboratory, where we saw steel subjected to various tests for hardness, tensile qualities and other characteristics. This was an academic performance, however. It lacked the lurid glow of blast-furnaces, the naked, sweating backs, the streams of molten ore, and all of the dramatic elements that had appealed to them in their study. Story material furnished this, but available stories were too long for group use, too adult, and of an entirely different emphasis than was required to show how the workmen felt. So the problem was to find an expression of feeling in brief space and intense form. We turned to poetry.

I volunteered to find what I could and bring it into the classroom. I chose a group of poems about work in general and any occupations on which I could find poetic treatment. Among these were Braley's "The Thinker," VanDyke's "Work," Untermeyer's "Caliban in the Coal Mines," Alcott's "Song from the Suds," Sandburg's "The Fish Crier," Whitman's "I Hear America Singing," Masfield's "Sea Fever," and Virna Sheard's "Postman." These were a wide assortment as to content, some of them dealing with respect for a job, some with the wider implications of common tasks, but all showing attitudes toward work. I read them aloud, letting them speak for themselves.

They were an entering wedge.

Strangely enough, they were well received, weighed, discussed and accepted. It didn't end there. In the first place, the poems were by no means conclusive evidence on either side of the question. In the second place, they brought almost as many volumes of poetry into the room as there were poems. More books were brought in. Much reading and sorting went on. Different children prepared and presented poems they had found independently. This offered a real motive for careful preparation and good oral reading, which the group, because it was their own purpose, demanded now, rather than ridiculed.

The widely scattered poems presented a difficulty for which the group found a solution. They hit upon the idea of making a collection of poems concerning work and workers. It appealed to them because they could nowhere find it adequately done for their use. They attacked it with a group purpose and accepted it as a thing that they must do co-operatively. Their plan involved copying the poems in manuscript writing and illustrating each page in terms of the poem it held. I was called on to give lessons in manuscript writing as an art subject. When the plan had been made, each child undertook to prepare the poem of his choice, among those the group had accepted.

And so the book progressed until something like twenty-eight poems had been completed. At the last possible moment, it was bound, though not pronounced finished. The group was proud of it as a piece of work and as a contribution to future classes. From the standpoint of my judgment, the workmanship was not all that might be desired from a sixth grade group. As a finished art product it showed many glaring faults in workmanship. However, it was a matter of relative values. From the children's point of view, satisfaction was absolutely necessary. Throughout the experience they had

worked at white heat and could scarcely wait until they had something to show for their effort. Had I insisted on workmanship comparable to sixth grade standards, it would have been a wrench in the wheels of their progress. As it was, every child was represented by one or more pages, which wouldn't have been possible otherwise. The book as an end product, is one I would hesitate to show to a person who didn't understand the growth it represented. I prize its very imperfections.

In any evaluation of this growth, there are several phases to be considered. I noted in the course of the reading and discussion, a distinct growth in appreciation and critical judgment. It became no longer a consideration of content alone which made them accept a poem, but also of the perfection of the poetic skill and the sincerity of the poem. It seemed highly significant to me that "Caliban in the Coal Mines" was the favorite of the lot, most frequently read. For them the final chord he strikes with, "Fling us a handful of stars!" put to shame the obvious platitudes of Mr. Guest's, "Just a Job."

This whole experience furnished a fine setting for well motivated oral language. The sincere interest and the impact of new ideas brought about the expression of individual thinking. It was not a situation in which the children retailed cut and dried ideas, but rather one in which they needed to plumb the depths of their own thinking and finish and expand ideas subtly expressed in the poetry.

Contact with these poetic interpretations of common tasks awakened them to a new significance in the people whose jobs they had looked on thoughtlessly or with deprecation. I believe none of them can pass a postman in the street, now, without seeing his job as it touches other lives. Caliban gave them a new vivid con-

cept of the coal-miner's lot, a telephone operator and a copper wire were invested with importance and romance. Their own mothers, pictured as financiers in Morley's "The Fat Little Purse," put the job of housewife in a new light. In Sherman Conrad's "To Teachers," they felt the responsibility of teachers to mold the lives of their pupils. The fact that behind every job there must be a vision and a plan in the mind of the "Thinker," that a poet's work might last longer than steel or cement, all of these ideas opened their eyes and brought forth such comments as, "Gee, I never thought about a postman that way, and I meet him every day, no matter what the weather is," or, "Who'd ever think that a fish man cared about his fish, but then, you can tell that the farmers in the market like their things, because they arrange them so nicely and scrub them so clean." One boy said, "We couldn't be warm or even have our building if it weren't for the men in those dark mines!" The awe of their tones showed a new attitude toward people. Their working together gave them a new attitude toward each other, a new appreciation of what each one did best.

I realize that the subject for this discussion is creative writing, and that up to this point, I have said nothing about it. The logical next step was for these people to express new-found attitudes and ideas for themselves, and add them to their anthology. However, our time was gone and the only thing I could do in sending them to junior high school, was to send with them the history of our work and the belief that they were ready to do creative writing. They were responsive to stimulation, secure that they as a group could do a worthy piece of work, open to poetic thoughts and enthusiastic about their own job of going to school.



# The Approach to Reading as a Meaningful Process

JOHN W. CARR

*Duke University, Durham, North Carolina*

READING takes place when thought is stimulated by printed or written material. It is not an exercise in calling words or in making sounds which correspond to symbols. Regardless of whether the reading be done orally or silently, the essential phase of the process is this: The reader should be thinking an experience which is similar to that which the writer intended to convey. In good oral reading the pupil thinks the experience out loud with the intention of conveying it to an audience; in silent reading the child thinks the experience without vocalization.

The child will not use reading skills as a means toward thinking if the learning of the skills has been a mere mechanical exercise. The analysis and recognition of words, then, should be learned in relationship with the analysis and recognition of meaning. Teachers who have observed that children do learn to read when the teaching emphasis is on mechanics separated from meaning might raise this objection: "But children do learn to read when given drill on word forms without reference to meanings, when practiced on the meaningless sounding of symbols." The answer to this argument is: Children taught in this fashion learn to read for meaning because they realize the purpose of the drill on mechanics either before or after such specific learnings have been acquired. Since the pupil must ultimately regard reading as a process of getting meanings, it is economical to have him start practice with the attitude that the symbols on the board, on the chart, or on

the printed page correspond to a language experience which has meaning to him. The pupil should not regard these symbols as mere representations of sounds or as mere visual forms to be remembered.

The emphasis on mechanics to the neglect of meaning in teaching frequently fixes such bad habits as word calling in oral reading. Children who have become habitual "word-callers" read orally in a jerky fashion, without the natural rhythm characteristic of good language expression. Such readers habitually use a flat, expressionless tone of voice which indicates that the exercise does not stimulate thought. It seems logical to conclude that word-callers, when told to read silently, merely react to sounds while suppressing vocalization. It is not surprising that word-callers seldom get sense out of their attempts to read silently.

Mechanical skills (such as ability to analyze words phonetically and visually, to make the sounds corresponding to phonograms, the ability to work out independently a new combination of known symbols so as to call the correct word) are essential to the reading process; but such skills should grow out of or be related to good reading adaptations (such as the understanding that reading is a process involving the getting of meanings from print, an appreciation of the pleasure to be obtained from reading stories in books, the realization that language stimulated by print and thought by a reader has meaning just as does language which is heard). The foregoing

signifies that phonetics and other tools for solving word analysis problems are a means toward the thinking of printed or written language. Such tools should receive strong emphasis in the teaching of reading, but the learner should understand that his word-analysis keys belong to the reasoning and experiencing process which constitutes the whole of reading. It is best that the mechanics be learned as an intrinsic part of the process of getting meanings.

The meaningful approach to reading described above implies that young children should have a background of broad, enriched personal experiences before an attempt is made to teach them the mechanics of reading. Out of life experiences, some directly personal and others vicarious, the child in the kindergarten-primary years should develop good oral expression and a degree of language intelligence normal for his age. The child who has achieved such development has made essential progress toward readiness for reading. The stages in language growth through which the child should go repeatedly, prior to formal reading instruction, are: (1) experiences related to his dominant life purposes; (2) expression of these experiences in language; (3) hearing other children express similar experiences in language; (4) hearing much language with form, structure, and content which is above his present power of oral expression, that is, stories of real literary value read from books; (5) dramatization of some of the experiences which he gets at second hand so that the language may become more real to him; (6) in general, learning to express valuable thought content on a high cultural level, using an enriched vocabulary, speaking in complete sentences, organizing these sentences into structural wholes, paragraphs and larger units.

The child who has had broad experiences, who has heard much good English

which he can understand, who has talked much good English out of his own experiences—such a child is ready for reading as a meaningful process. When teachers attempt to teach reading prior to the development of such a background of language meanings in the mind of the pupil, the result will most likely be a sort of pseudo-learning: The child will learn merely to make meaningless sounds in response to meaningless symbols.

It is generally held that a child should have a mental age of six years before he is ready for formal instruction in reading. It would seem that in the case of most children the essential development needed is a capacity which may be called language intelligence; indicated by the ability to obtain experience from heard language, to express ideas in oral language, and to think on a six year old level in relation to language ideas and experience. Children handicapped in hearing and speaking, but normal in other respects, despite the fact that they do not have this specific type of language intelligence, can be taught to read by special methods; however, if a pupil is to learn to read under the group instruction usually given in public schools, language development up to a six year old level seems essential. When interpreting the principle that the child should have a mental age of six, teachers should remember that children differ in rate of mental growth. Some children achieve the required level at the age of four and some, the feeble-minded, never attain it.

It follows from what has been stated above, that enriched direct experiences converted into language meanings are the basis for the reading process. This is true, regardless of the stage of reading maturity. The child who has made progress beyond the stage of learning mechanics uses a book to reconstruct experiences which he has previously thought out or which he can create through constructive think-

ing; out of this reconstruction of experience, the mature reader obtains new experiences. The immature reader, who is confronted with the difficult problem of learning the mechanics of the process, must be given in advance the meaning which he is expected to obtain. It is often desirable that the beginner, prior to attempting to read a passage, should be led to express orally the meaning of the passage in words very similar to those in the printed material.

There are two elements in the reading process: (1) mechanics, and (2) language meanings. When the pupil is striving to learn the machinery of the process, it is essential that the language and meaning be in mind prior to the attempt to read. When this is the case, the pupil progresses from an experience held in mind toward improvement in mechanics. The two elements are unified as parts of a meaningful whole. Having developed independence in the use of mechanics, the more mature reader can use fundamental reading habits to reconstruct new experiences out of printed materials.

Pupils should grow in reading ability all the way through the grades, but the type of growth should differ from year to year. Vivid, direct experiences out of which language meanings evolve are important in every stage of this growth. In the early grades such experiences are absolutely essential because they furnish the background for developing independence in the intelligent use of mechanics; in the later years of school life, language meanings give an enriched background for interpreting what is read. What the mature reader knows and can think about as he reads determines the depth and accuracy of his comprehension.

The points of view expressed above—that all work in reading should be meaningful to the pupil, that mechanics and meanings should be learned as a unified whole, that direct personal experiences

expressed as language meanings are basic to reading progress in all grades—do not mean that children can be expected to develop skills and habits without direct instruction and drill. It is true that some children do achieve independence in word recognition without drill on phonetic analysis or visual methods of breaking up words. A minority of beginners will catch on to the trick of word analysis while reading meaningful, interesting material and will give themselves the very best type of drill—repeated analysis of words in actual contextual situations. Children who show such special capacity for learning word analysis merely need reading practice on interesting material in which easy words are frequently repeated in varying contexts. Such learning to read by reading is the best possible drill on mechanics for children who can discover good methods of word analysis.

Practically all children will need some guidance in distinguishing similarities and differences among words and in analyzing words both visually and phonetically. The majority of the children in a class will profit by systematic drill on mechanics and meanings intrinsically combined. The best exercise in word recognition is the kind which guides the child toward proper analysis as the reading process is going on. Teachers usually give children guidance in phonetic analysis in oral reading exercises. A. I. Gates in *New Methods in Primary Reading* gives numerous suggestions for work materials which lead children to analyze words while reading silently. The fundamental idea in his intrinsic work materials is that the child is guided through a series of exercises in distinguishing words from others which are very much like them. The type of analysis used is largely visual, and the analytical process is closely related to meaningful reading exercises.

Dr. Gates describes in the book men-

tioned above several stages through which children go in progressing toward maturity in fundamental reading habits. Primary teachers should learn to distinguish stages of growth toward independence in word recognition; then they should provide, in both oral and silent reading, exercises which will promote the development of desirable skills and facility in the use of such skills. All elementary teachers should study the problem of developing fundamental skills because in every grade from the first to the high school there are children who have not acquired complete independence in the use of the mechanics of reading.

A properly organized drill program for developing ability in word analysis provides for repetition, but this does not consist of doing the same exercise again and again. The right kind of repetition is given when the learner confronts a graded series of problems in word analysis, each one in some respect like a prob-

lem previously solved, yet different in that it requires the pupil to make some new meaning reaction or to use his present skill in analysis in a new way.

Skills developed in drill exercises are of no value unless they are used in the actual process of reading for meaning. In this respect learning to read is similar to learning to play tennis. Such exercises as batting a ball against a wall will help one in learning new strokes in tennis only when one has in view a purpose growing out of an attempt to improve in playing the real game. In the end the desired stroke must become a part of one's play in the real game or the exercise has been useless. Tennis players usually learn to play the game by concentrating on particular phases of it while actually playing. In learning to read, the type of drill is most helpful which is most intrinsically related to the process of getting meanings from printed symbols.

---

### CONTEMPORARY POETRY FOR CHILDREN

(Continued from page 138)

verse is frequently too mature (in spirit and temperament, rather than in content or style) and occasionally too ironic for children, or their teachers or parents—not quite sweet enough or slick enough. Perhaps it is often cerebral, rather than

emotional in tone, and perhaps it is not often sufficiently lyrical to conquer the "poetic passivity" of readers. I can testify that it took more than one reading of Miss Shannon's volume to bring me to an appreciation of its unique quality.



# Research Problems in Reading in the Elementary School\*

D. D. DURRELL, *Chairman*  
*School of Education, Boston University*

(Continued from March)

For practical purposes, prediction tables which show the effect of percentile or decile positions on later success in reading are to be preferred to general statements of correlation. In such a table, Monroe (73)<sup>1</sup> demonstrates that the children who scored in the top 20% on her combined tests were uniformly successful, while those who stood in the bottom 10% were uniformly unsuccessful. Children between these positions varied greatly in their degree of success in reading. It is evident that perfect predictability is yet to be achieved. Just what degree of predictability is possible of attainment is difficult to determine. Many factors such as poor motivation, poor health, absence from school, and lack of provision for individual differences and difficulties in learning, to mention only a few, would tend to make perfect prediction difficult.

3. What types of instruction and experiences may be given the pre-primary child to give him an adequate foundation for reading? The study by Wellman (102) shows that pre-school and kindergarten experiences tend to make for later school success, but the results do not analyze the elements in the total situation that are essential to that success. Waters (100) suggests a method for specific instruction in pre-reading experiences, but presents no evidence of its effectiveness.

There are undoubtedly many types of

learning in pre-reading experiences that bear directly upon success in reading. It is possible that reading development is a process of gradual growth from the earliest experiences of the child. If the physical and psychological background that makes for success in reading were definitely known, early kindergarten entrance tests might make possible an analysis of weaknesses. Techniques of instruction might be designed and evaluated to take care of these weaknesses. Reading readiness testing would then be a process of measuring early stages of reading achievement.

## *Suggested problems for research in reading readiness*

1. An item evaluation of various types of intelligence and reading readiness tests to determine which elements are most closely allied to success in reading. Some of the phases of this study are the following:

- a. Determining of skills that bear directly upon reading success.
- b. Evaluating the validity of various methods of measuring the skill. Visual discrimination may be measured in a variety of ways such as: matching drawings of various shapes, by comparison of word and letters by matching or multiple choice techniques, by selecting from a multiple choice situation a word previously shown, by drawing of designs from copy or from memory,

\* The Fourth Annual Research Bulletin of The National Conference on Research in Elementary School English.

<sup>1</sup> Parenthetical numbers refer to studies listed in the Bibliography. See the March REVIEW.

and by methods combining visual discrimination with other psychological skills. Certain of these might be much more predictive of success in reading than others.

2. The evaluation of the importance of the various elements of reading readiness for different types of reading instruction. Bond suggests that auditory discrimination is particularly necessary for instruction in direct phonic methods. Possibly different degrees of various elements are necessary for the various types of instruction in beginning reading. In further evaluation of these psychological skills, it would be desirable to know minimum scores for success in each type of reading, desirable combinations for success in reading, and methods of predicting rate of learning in each of the methods.

3. The evaluation of various methods of instruction for improving reading readiness. It would be desirable to know which of the skills are coachable and which are products of maturation independent of environment. A large number of the background skills which are essential to reading are probably the products of incidental learnings, in which children vary widely. The observation of various types of development in pre-school children might lead to a better knowledge of the origins and causes of individual differences in the psychological skills essential to reading.

#### *Research in progress in reading readiness*

1. At Stanford University two studies in reading readiness are in progress. The first relates to a review of the literature in reference to readiness in reading and arithmetic, while the second deals with a similar review of the literature in relation to maturation and its significance in reading with elementary school children. Reported by Dr. Paul R. Hanna.

2. At Teachers College, Columbia

University, an investigation of reading readiness and reading maturity is under way. This investigation was begun in September, 1934, under the direction of Dr. A. I. Gates, with Dr. Guy L. Bond in immediate charge. One hundred and fifty children entering the first grade were tested, measured, or observed individually at least three times during the year on approximately one hundred characteristics. A number of reading readiness tests were used, as well as a large number of special tests made up for the purpose: tests of hearing; tests of vision; analyses of home background, interests, previous training, personality characteristics; observations and measurements of speech, ability to understand spoken materials, ability to answer questions, complete a story, tell a story; and many other tests. The instruction in reading was kept under fairly definite control. Measurements of reading achievement, reading limitations, and errors were obtained throughout the year. From these data it is hoped that the influence of a good many different factors on learning to read may be determined. A large number of examinations, especially those of vision, hearing, perception, etc., will be repeated on the same children at the beginning, middle, and end of this year. Reported by Dr. A. I. Gates.

3. Another study at Teachers College is that of C. C. Bennett which deals with the relationships between various personality factors, including influence in the home background in the pre-school period, and reading ability and disability. Reported by Dr. A. I. Gates.

4. At Boston University a study of the relationships between certain perceptual abilities and different types of reading achievement in first grade is under way. It is desired to determine whether certain perceptual skills favor development in immediate recognition of words, word analysis by different methods, or make for specific types of errors and difficulties

in reading development. Reported by Dr. D. D. Durrell.

### III. PRIMARY READING PROBLEMS

#### *Problems relating to general methods of beginning reading*

1. When should formal instruction in reading begin? Might it not be delayed with profit to the later primary grades? There is much discussion but little evidence on this point.
2. What are the relative merits of some of the general approaches to beginning reading? The different approaches are now justified on various psychological grounds and on the fact that children are successfully taught to read by them. There is no statistical evidence of the relative merits of the following methods:
  - a. Silent reading through various devices. See Watkins (101).
  - b. Oral reading methods in common use.
  - c. The kinesthetic method. See Fernald and Keller (34). Kirk (62) reports that manual tracing is a superior method in the case of sub-normal boys.
3. What are the relative merits of the systematic approach used in the basal reading systems, and the activity or "opportunistic" approach in which no basal system is used? The study of Gates, Bachelder, and Betzner (44) indicated that the systematic approach was superior in most of the outcomes tested. While the study was carefully controlled and the outcomes evaluated in detail, the study was done with only 25 pairs of children. A similar study on a wider scale and over a longer period of time might be profitable.
4. What are the merits of extensive individual reading as compared to class instruction? Zirbes (111) in a study of paired groups in a second grade concluded that extensive reading was superior for children who were reading more than sixty words per minute but that class instruction was better for children reading below this rate. In a more comprehensive study involving approximately 500 children in each grade, Field (35) finds no significant differences between these two types of instruction for groups of high, average, or low intelligence in grades two to four.
5. What are the relative merits of activity programs in connection with reading? The *Thirty-Third Yearbook* of the National Society for the Study of Education (76) and many of the manuals of the newer reading systems give evidence of a widespread belief that activities strengthen the program in primary reading. Lee (66) presents a questionnaire study which suggests that the too extensive use of activities in connection with reading is of doubtful value. The following studies are indicated as needing further research.
  - a. What types of activities specifically benefit reading?
  - b. In what ways do they benefit reading? Do they reduce the number of practices necessary to recognize new words? Do they produce outcomes that are not now measured by objective techniques? Can measures of such outcomes be designed?
6. What is the value of workbook and workbook materials in connection with primary reading? Gates (41) reports greater gains in reading achievement and greater interest when workbook materials are used. Pierce and Quin (81) report that in a study of 18 pairs of children in grade one, it appeared that picture dictionary materials favored individual progress while workbook material was better for group use. The following studies are indicated for further investigation:
  - a. What types of workbook activities are beneficial?

- b. Are certain children less able to profit by workbooks? Are workbooks more suitable at certain levels of reading maturity than at others? Is there a difference in bright and dull children in their ability to use workbooks independently?

7. Are half-day sessions beneficial to children in the primary grades? In a study of 79 children in half-day sessions, in the first grade, Fillers (36) reports that these children average scores of 33% of correct responses on a test of oral reading of phrases as compared to an average of 80% correct responses by 219 children in full day sessions. While there was no attempt to control the variables that might affect the scores, this study suggests that further evaluation of the half-day session might be desirable.

8. What are the relative merits of the different standard basal systems in beginning reading? There is a surprising lack of evidence on this point. Seegars (86) in a study of 2,335 first grade children in Pennsylvania public schools finds no differences in the merits of the various reading systems used by these children. Bergman and Vreeland (4) compared the *Picture-Story* with the *Keystone Reader* in a study of first grade children in six public schools in Detroit. They found no significant differences between the achievements of children taught by the two methods, the *Keystone* method appearing to be superior as measured by the Detroit Word Recognition Test and the *Picture-Story* method yielding superior results on the Detroit Beginning Reading Test.

Is it too much to ask that a new reading system be evaluated carefully in regard to its merits before it is published?

9. What is the effect of different types of handwriting on reading achievement? Voorhis (98) in a study involving 195 children reports significant differences in reading achievement in favor of children

who use manuscript writing as compared to children using script writing. Long and Mayer present similar findings on a controlled experiment involving 948 children in paired groups in grade one.

10. What is the effect of typewriting on reading achievement? In a carefully controlled study of two first grade groups of 113 children each, Unzicker (96) found slight but consistent differences in reading achievement in favor of children who used the typewriter as compared to children who had no typewriting.

11. Are there significant sex differences in reading achievement? Donnelly (27) reports significant differences in reading achievement in favor of girls as compared to boys as early as the third month of the first grade. Significant differences appeared in the sixth and ninth month also. Cutright and Anderson (21) report similar findings. Durrell (30) and St. John (88) report sex differences in achievement in the middle grades. All studies of reading disabilities show a preponderance of boys coming to clinics for assistance. Of 415 cases of reading difficulty reported by Monroe (72) the ratio of boys to girls was approximately five to one. Some of the following studies might be pursued in this field:

- a. Are there sex differences in reading readiness? In what fields are these sex differences most evident? There is a general belief, but little evidence, that girls mature mentally more rapidly than do boys. Donnelly's study found no significant difference in mental age to account for the sex differences in reading achievement.
- b. Are there differences in the amounts of out-of-school practice in reading that would account for these sex differences? A study of the amount of time spent in reading at home or in playing school might yield evidence on this point.
- c. Is the difference based on superior



motivation for the girls? In a study of children's interests in the primary grades, Gates (41) found no significant sex differences. Would more searching studies show that the usual stories in primary grade reading materials are of less interest to boys than to girls?

12. What types of reading are of greater interest to children in the primary grades? It is extremely difficult to generalize on this point due to the fact that the significant elements in stories are difficult to isolate. It appears that stories need to be evaluated separately since no story type or element is an assurance that the story will be liked by children. The interest in this field is evidenced by the large number of studies in it. See Gates (41), Huber (59), Bruner (13), Dowell and Garrison (28), Washburne and Vogel (99), Jordan (61), Stone (89), Gates, Peardon and Sartorius (46).

13. What are the most suitable techniques for providing for individual differences in learning? Wide differences in the reading accomplishment of children of the same age are evident in every tabulation of test results. The recognition of individual differences is probably one of the most important outcomes of the standard test movement. There seems to be little point, however, in observing individual differences unless there is some attempt to adjust the instruction to the differences found.

In the usual types of classroom instruction Lee (64), Ladd (63), and Brown and Lind (11) show that bright children achieve less than would be expected for their mental ages. The studies of Coy (20) and Cobb and Taylor (19) demonstrate that bright children are able to achieve up to their mental capacities when they are given suitable instruction. The rapid gains in remedial instruction reported by Monroe (72), are indicative of progress that may be made with cer-

tain children when instruction is suited to the child's difficulties and to his level and rate of learning. Hegge (52), working with two groups of mentally deficient children, one group of 13 and one of 14, found that by special instruction in reading these children progressed three to four times as rapidly as those in regular classes.

It seems evident that if classroom provision for individual differences could be made, more rapid progress should result. One of the attempts to care for individual differences has been the use of ability grouping. The studies of Burr (15) and West (103) show that present methods of homogeneous grouping in the elementary school reduce only slightly the amount of variability in the groups. The case study approach of Duffy and Durrell (29) indicates that there are wide differences in the faulty habits and difficulties of children who are reading on approximately the same level. Miller and Otto (71) in reviewing twenty studies in homogeneous grouping report conflicting evidence as to its merits.

14. Miscellaneous problems relating to mechanics of silent and oral reading in the primary grades.

- a. What are the optimum amounts of oral and silent reading in the primary grades? The rate studies of Gray (50) indicate that the oral reading speed is faster than the silent reading speed in these grades. Is this a consequence of the type of instruction the children received, or does it indicate that oral reading is basically the more facile skill?
- b. Is audience reading more beneficial than the "look on while listening" method? Are there any merits of the latter method at any level of reading?
- c. What sorts of exercises are the most suitable for increasing speed of reading? What are the merits of

phrase drills, of extensive easy reading, or reading under time pressure, or of pacing the rate through controlled exercises?

- d. What are the actual handicaps of various habits such as lip movements, finger pointing, head movements, and whispering? What are the best techniques for eliminating these habits?
- e. What sorts of motivating techniques have the most value in primary reading? Some of the types that need evaluation are appreciation lessons prior to reading, activities relating to reading, devices for indicating progress, and various sorts of contests and rewards.

15. Every problem in the field of reading relates to that of providing for individual differences. A large number of studies will be necessary before we have an adequate solution to the problem. The following are some studies which relate specifically to individual differences:

- a. The improvement of measures for observation of individual differences.
- b. The preparation and evaluation of materials of instruction suited to individual progress rates such as work-books, reference materials of different vocabulary burdens, special types of developmental lessons suited to different needs, and other materials which would aid in classroom provision for individual differences.
- c. Evaluation of various administrative methods of providing for individual differences such as ability grouping, multiple track plans, individualized progress through job-sheets and "contracts," and various forms of flexible promotion.
- d. Evaluation of administrative methods for providing for individual

differences within the classroom such as small group work, the use of pupil teachers, extensive individual reading, "unit master" plans, and the use of various self-administering assignments.

#### *Research in progress in general methods*

At Teachers College, Columbia University, a study is under way which deals with the construction and try-out of a body of materials for remedial reading for pupils whose reading ability falls within the range of the first three grades. This material consists primarily in the development of a large number of stories, informative materials, directions, word study activities, etc., within the limits of a common vocabulary. The aim is to have a large amount of material which is entirely or nearly free from "new words." It is planned to try out this material in the instruction of remedial cases and normal pupils in regular classes, especially pupils falling in the dull normal group. Reported by Dr. A. I. Gates.

#### *Problems relating to vocabulary*

1. What is the optimum vocabulary burden for the various levels in the primary grades? From a series of experiments in the first grade level, Gates (41) makes the following "guesses" as to the number of repetitions per word that must be provided in classroom instruction for first year pupils whose chronological ages range from 6.1 to 7.5 years:

<i>Range of I.Q.</i>	<i>Number of repetitions</i>
120-129	20
110-119	30
90-109	35
80- 89	40
70- 79	45
60- 69	55

There are a large number of studies which should be undertaken in this field.

Among them are the following:

- a. Verification of the above "guesses" by further studies.
  - b. Should the child be required to master 100% of the words as he progresses?
  - c. What should be the required standard for mastery? Ability to pronounce on analysis? Ability to read the word without hesitation? Ability to read the word from a tachistoscopic presentation?
  - d. Will children progress faster when the vocabulary burden is kept relatively easy than when it is relatively difficult?
  - e. Are inventory tests of new words with remedial instruction on words missed desirable?
  - f. What are the most efficient techniques for providing for individual differences in vocabulary growth?
2. What are the best techniques for developing a sight vocabulary? Are some methods more suitable than others for certain children? Are some more suitable at the early levels than at later stages in the child's maturity? Some of the methods suggested in the educational literature which need evaluation follow:
- a. Phrase and sentence methods.
  - b. Flash cards. Gates (42) doubts whether there is much transfer from the flash cards to the textbook. Are there methods of assuring transfer?
  - c. Picture dictionary techniques.
  - d. Word comparison exercises and various sorts of games and seat work.
  - e. Kinesthetic methods, tracing, and various methods involving copying and writing. This method has been suggested by Fernald and Keller as being suitable for non-readers. It is often suggested as a method of overcoming the reversal error in reading.
  - f. Enrichment of words. More colorful or meaningful words appear to be learned more readily. Is the enrichment of words a satisfactory method of getting better retention in word recognition?
  - g. Unzicker (96) finds that the use of the typewriter affects reading favorably. Is the use of the typewriter an efficient method of improving recognition?
  - h. The use of lantern slides. Zyve (112) shows that the lantern slide is an efficient means of increasing ability in spelling. Is it suitable in word recognition?
  - i. Tachistoscopic presentation. While this device has been used in testing (Payne [80], Durrell [31]) there is no report on its relative effectiveness in reducing the minimal cues necessary to recognize words.
  - j. Are certain of the above techniques more suitable for children who show deficiencies in any of the background skills as outlined in the reading readiness tests? Should we teach to strength or to weaknesses? If a child is poor in motor skills, should motor methods be used or avoided?
3. What are the chief causes of failure in the word mastery skills? What are the most common types of error? Reed (83) and Monroe (72) show that a large number of children's errors are due to confusion in visual perception. Reversal errors have come in for a great deal of attention with reading difficulties. Orton (79) feels that they are neurological in origin, while Gates and Bennett (45) interpret them as errors due to immaturity in perception. There are several studies which might be made in this field:
- a. What are the most commonly confused words or types of words? The words which seem to give the most

difficulty in beginning reading are those beginning with *wh* or *th*.

- b. What are the most common types of errors?
- c. Can commonly used words be so grouped or taught so as to minimize the difficulty?
- d. Should similar forms be taught simultaneously or should such forms be spaced so that one form is mastered before similar forms are presented?
- e. Can pre-reading exercises in word recognition provide a safeguard against the development of different sorts of errors?

4. Should the teaching of a sight vocabulary come before the teaching of word analysis? The study of Gates (40), Garrison and Heard (38), and Sexton and Harron (87) all seem to give an affirmative answer to the question. However, the reading readiness tests show that children who have acquired certain perceptual skills make better progress in reading than those who have not acquired them. The following studies are indicated:

- a. How large a sight vocabulary should be taught before specific instruction in word analysis is begun?
- b. Is there a minimum knowledge of word perception—visual analysis or ear training—that should be acquired before reading instruction begins?

5. How much instruction in word meaning should be necessary in the primary grades? The study of Horn (58), shows that there are 2,500 words commonly in the vocabulary of six year olds. Waters (100) shows that large numbers of the words in the stories of first grade readers are unknown to children. Since fewer than 2,000 words are found in the primary sets of basal readers, should the vocabularies of readers be limited to

those words commonly known to children? Would a greater efficiency be attained if growth in meaning vocabulary came first in oral language experiences rather than in reading experiences? The studies of Foster (37) and Clarke (18) indicate that simplifying the vocabulary of selections makes for better and quicker understanding of material read.

#### *Research in progress related to vocabulary*

1. At the University of Illinois, research is under way on a tested beginner's vocabulary. Words known to children in the first grade are being determined by individual testing by an experienced examiner. The meaning of "word knowledge" is carefully defined, and a word must be known to 75 children out of 100 to be accepted for the list. The full range of children's experience is being investigated, field after field being covered in order. The basis for the testing is the combined Word List, soon to be published, which contains all of the words on eleven well-known lists. Reported by Dr. E. W. Dolch.

2. At Teachers College, Columbia University, a study of the number and distribution of the words on the Thorndike Word Lists, the meanings of which are known by pupils at different grade positions and of different mental age status, is under way. This is a problem of determining the number and location of the words in the list which are known to children of varying reading age status. The study is designed to produce data of value in determining the suitability of reading material for children at different levels. Reported by Dr. A. I. Gates.

3. At Boston University different levels of perception in sight vocabulary are being studied by means of a variable tachistoscope. Minimal cues necessary to recognize words vary considerably for different children. Reported by Dr. Thomas H. Eames.



# Editorial

## "Caviare to the General"

FOR A long time, educators have been interested in the adaptation of vocabulary in school books to the maturity and interests of children. The desirability of scientifically limiting the vocabulary in any particular book to a grade or age level has become an issue.

There is a story current that Frederick Breed complained that Ernest Horn would omit "Santa Claus" from the word lists of primary-school children; whereupon Horn asked if he should include also "upsy-daisy." The issue has been fought over hardest in these marginal regions—the words that will most surely vanish from the vocabularies of children as they advance into adulthood, and those that are characteristically of interest only to adults. Such questions emerge as: Shall we teach merely to satisfy the present interest of children? Shall we lay chief emphasis upon those items that are identical with the interests of adult life (deferred values)?

While the discussion has been going on, science has continued to make contributions to the definiteness of specific word lists, and to special vocabulary significance. Science, too, has opened up new vistas, showing fallacies in limited viewpoints.

The major effect in the publishing field has been to produce text books and books for children with a downward trend in vocabulary selection. A form of reading matter in text books and readers has resulted that is scientific and modern, and in this sense totally unrelated to literature. It is a form of writing that comes from statistical sophistication entirely intellectual in origin.

Comment here, however, is pointed solely to the tendency to lower vocabulary levels in the reading matter of text books for children. There can be little

doubt, it would seem, of the desirability of including, for the sake of intelligibility, a percentage—some reasonably determined or scientifically gauged proportion—of words recognized as belonging to the vocabularies of children in certain grades or age groups. Let this be granted. The question of deep concern now is to what extent shall the whole vocabulary range of a given piece of writing, or the vocabulary interests of a given group of children, be leveled downward. Shall there be no upper reaches? Shall there be a general depression along the whole vocabulary front?

It would seem the better part of wisdom to offset the vocabulary impoverishment resulting from high-frequency word selections, by deliberately releasing influences that promote vocabulary growth and spiraling. The brag quality of scientifically restricted vocabularies in children's text books and readers becomes an educational menace if the upward trends are not stimulated in word interest and growth.

Two main sources may be drawn upon for this uplift: attention to diction in writing and interest in literature in the very best sense of the term. Dare to teach the words in *Alice in Wonderland* that are beyond children against the time when they shall read that classic, rather than eliminate the words and give them an altered and emaciated version. The reduced vocabulary should be balanced by a literary vocabulary. Why not determine word frequencies in children's classics, and mix a little caviare for the general? If the maker of children's textbooks stoops to the level of his readers in the wording of context, he must face the responsibility of helping them rise above the paucity of their own vocabularies.

# Reviews and Abstracts

**English Activities.** By Hatfield, W. W., Lewis, E. E., et al. American Book Co., 1936. One volume each for grades 3-4-5-6.

This series attempts to carry out the recommendations of the Curriculum Commission of the National Council of Teachers of English. Because "English is a social subject," it provides "vital and meaningful situations" as the "core of the English curriculum," and attempts to "teach a few fundamental things thoroughly" through the inductive method.

The books are divided into "units" based upon themes drawn from other school subjects for the purpose of integrating English with other activities. In each unit a variety of activities is suggested, and each unit concludes with rather formal drill materials preceded by tests designed to show if individual children might profit from the drill.

The activities, in general individually interesting, deal with reasonable interests of children. They have been graded subjectively, and through a spiral approach successive volumes attempt to amplify and supplement previous materials. Interesting books are listed, and it is thought by the authors that the variety of reading and of activities provided will care for individual interests, while the tests diagnose from the standpoint of needed drill.

If language development is to be predicated upon the intrinsically motivated desires of children to transmit thought, one wonders whether any preconceived arrangement or selection of topics is really valid. True, induced interests may become quite potent. But it is by no means sure that all or most children will be sufficiently motivated by, or interested in, these specific units, in the order of presentation employed, to eliminate the lack of purpose inveighed against in the past. Even more forcibly must one question the introduction of manifestly extraneous materials dealing with "troublesome words," or other technical phases of usage. The need of corrective and constructive measures dealing with such phases is not questioned. But the propriety of such inclusions in "units" which may or may not have stimulated the use of them is, to say the least, dubious. They seem to introduce a discordant element which is further accentuated by the fact that the activities themselves do not, in many instances, seem to lend themselves to the unit idea. Those in each unit are usually related in that they deal with similar subject-matter, but a learning unit should be unified from the standpoint of the learning situation, rather than by the simple and arbitrary device of listing various suggested activities under a common title or subject.

For example, Unit II for grade 5 employs the theme "Nature's Ways." The sub-title, "Keeping to the Subject," indicates the learning activity contemplated. The unit includes, successively, general questions concerning nature, a story of Dan Beard, reference to Burbank, and assignment of a two-minute report upon something some naturalist did. Children are cautioned to choose a "narrow subject." Other topics dealing with nature are suggested. Then follow exercises on descriptive words, based upon descriptions of nature, "keeping a nature diary," "reading nature poetry," arranging a nature exhibit, formulating written and telephonic invitations to this exhibit, introducing friends who attend it, directions for individual activities such as for making seed collections, window boxes, a terrarium, for studying insects, devising nature riddles, and a reference to fables children might enjoy.

The nature idea is employed consistently. But from the standpoint of learning the unity of this unit is not obvious, nor is the succession of activities inevitable by any means. The whole list of activities might be foreign to the interests of the children, and neither the usage drills nor the elimination of those drills on the basis of the diagnostic tests might suit the needs of a particular group or individual.

In general, the activities, stories, and book lists seem to have been chosen with care and discrimination. The illustrations are good. The usage drills present materials which children normally employ. Teachers who desire such aids will find these books useful. But the artificiality of the continuity, the arbitrary introduction of the exercises on technical phases of language study, and the heterogeneous nature of many of the units themselves are definite weaknesses from the standpoint of the use of the books by children.

—J. C. Seegers

*Dean of Men, Temple University  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

**The Unit-Activity Reading Series: Teachers' Guide** for the First Year, preliminary edition; Tom's Trip, a preprimer; At Home and Away, a first reader; Round About You; In City and Country; Near and Far. By Nila Banton Smith. Silver, Burdett and Company, 1935.

A new concept of childhood education is coming into rapid acceptance throughout the country. It is supported by a somewhat changed interpretation of older concepts of intelligence and learning which amounts to a new psychology. Under the new philosophy, the aim of education is not to instruct

pupils in subject matter, but to guide the activities of childhood to educative ends. The school is regarded as a social community in which children live richly as children and work happily toward ends which for them are purposeful and significant. Subject matter is thought of in terms of units of living and learning rather than as material to be studied and recited. The curriculum is looked upon as a guided experience in living. Facing real-life situations in school and learning to meet them with responsibility under maximum self-direction with appropriate wise guidance by teachers and others represent the educative process functioning under the most ideal conditions.

A new program for reading which conforms to these principles better than any other procedure in that subject with which the present reviewer is familiar has just been published. Dean Nila Banton Smith, the author of the series, not only holds the modern conception of education, but she is a specialist in reading, who is conversant with recent scientific study in that field. She first made a penetrating study of significant historical aspects of reading,<sup>1</sup> and then outlined a procedure in teaching which conforms to the best scientific research and which profits from the perspective gained from her extensive historical study. Those who use Dean Smith's reading books will have the advantage of the opportunity to use her text on reading instruction as an aid in interpreting her theory of reading.

Dean Smith has apparently made a comprehensive examination of research materials in reading and especially certain well-known desiderata which apply to reading books.<sup>2</sup> She first gives a clear statement of the vocabulary load in each book in the series. The pre-primer, for example, contains 72 words, and 3 is the highest number of new words appearing on any page. The average is 1.8 new words per page. Every word is used 5 or more times in the pre-primer, and 69 of them are repeated 5 or more times in the primer. In each book is given a similar statement indicating clearly the vocabulary load which the book contains. This load is sufficiently low to permit comprehension to occur in such a manner as to favor the thinking which is a necessary aspect of reading.

On the other hand, with this properly and suitably limited vocabulary, books with a powerful appeal

to child interests have been written. The first reader, for example, deals with units in social science and natural science which occur most frequently in the school curriculum. An actual analysis of curricula was made in connection with the writing of these books which shows that in the second half of the first year curriculum topics of highest frequency are transportation; the school; city life, with emphasis upon the postman, policeman, and the fireman; the garden; wild animals; and common birds. By this connection with realistic community activities, the content of these reading books has a very high interest value for children.

"Reading," says Dean Smith, "is not a subject; it is simply a tool which we use in getting subject matter from the other fields. Since this is the case, we are bound to have an artificial situation so long as we organize reading instruction in terms of the subject of reading." It is in line with this thought that Dean Smith has organized her reading material, as presented in her books, around the social studies and science topics which most frequently form the backbone of the elementary school curriculum.

The fact that these books are geared directly into the entire curriculum instead of consisting of isolated reading activities is one of the very great merits of this reading system. The books break away from conventional and stereotyped methods in education to a desirable degree, but, on the other hand, written as they are by a person who has had abundant experience in teaching and in supervision of teachers, they measure up to the requirements of practicability in a remarkably excellent fashion. The result is an organization of a reading program which is distinctly usable by teachers who are the products of both contemporary and earlier teacher education. Alternative procedures in the use of the books are suggested for schools organized on the activity basis, and for schools which are following conventional ways. Thus the books are especially adapted to schools which wish to make a beginning in revising their procedures along more modern lines.

From whatever angle this reading series is considered, it seems clear first, it is adapted to modern conceptions of education in a remarkably excellent fashion, and second, that it is built on the basis of the results of research in reading with a rare degree of understanding and skill on the part of the author.

—Harry A. Brown  
Superintendent of Schools,  
Needham, Massachusetts

<sup>1</sup> Smith, Nila Banton. *Reading Instruction—Its Development and Its Significance in Gaining a Perspective on Current Practices in Reading*. Silver, Burdett, 1934.

<sup>2</sup> Thorndike, Edward L. "Improving the Ability to Read." *Teachers College Record*, December, 1934.

# Among the Publishers

## READING SERIES

**The Children's Bookshelf.** Compiled and edited by B. R. Buckingham. *The Attack and Other Stories.* Illus. by Kurt Wiese. 1936. \$1.08. *Too Many Bears and Other Stories.* Illus. by Kurt Wiese. 1936. \$1.08. Ginn and Company.

**Child Development Readers.** Edited by Julia Letheld Hahn. *Everyday Fun* (primer), by J. L. Hahn, illus. by Berta and Elmer Hader, 60¢; *Everyday Friends* (first reader by J. L. Hahn, illus. by Decie Merwin, 64¢; *Visits Here and There*, (second reader) by Julia Harris, illus. by Constance Whittemore, 72¢. *First Grade Manual*, by J. L. Hahn, 88¢. Houghton Mifflin, 1935.

**Happy Hour Readers.** By Mildred English and Thomas Alexander. *Spot* (pre-primer); *Jo-Boy* (primer), illus. by Rhoda Chase; *Good Friends* (first reader), illus. by Rhoda Chase; *Wheels and Wings* (second reader), illus. by Samuel B. Wiley; *Wide Windows* (third reader), illus. by Margaret Freeman and Marjorie Hartwell. Johnson Publishing Company, 1935.

**Reading to Learn.** By Gerald A. Yoakam, William C. Nagley, and Philip A. Knowlton. Book two, illus. by George M. Richards, 1935. 92¢; Book three, illus. by George M. Richards, 1935. 96¢. Macmillan.

## SINGLE VOLUMES FOR SUPPLEMENTARY READING

**Hoot-Owl.** By Mabel Guinnip La Rue. Illus. by Kate Seredy. Macmillan, 1936. 84¢.

**Kites and Kimonos.** By Elinor Hedrick and Kathryn Van Noy. Illus. by Bunji Tagawa. Macmillan. 84¢.

**The Uncle Remus Book.** By Joel Chandler Harris. Retold by Miriam Blanton Huber. Illus. by A. B. Frost. Appleton-Century, 1935. 80¢.

**The Work of Scientists.** By Edith M. Patch and Harrison E. Howe. Illus. by Eleanor O. Eadie, and others. Macmillan, 1935.

## THE TEACHING OF READING

**Better Reading Instruction: A Survey of Research and Successful Practice.** Research Bulletin of the National Education Association, Vol. 13, No. 5. November, 1935.

**How to Read Aloud.** By H. H. Fuller and A. T. Weaver. Silver, Burdett, 1935. \$1.00.

**Learning How to Learn.** With Special Emphasis on Improving Reading Ability. By Walter B. Pitkin, H. C. Newton, and O. P. Langham. McGraw-Hill, 1935. 92¢.

**Reading Aptitude Tests.** By Marion Monroe. Houghton Mifflin, 1935.

**Teaching of Reading for Better Living.** By Mary E. Pennell and A. M. Cusack. Houghton Mifflin, 1935. \$2.00.

## SPELLING AND COMPOSITION

**The Progressive Spelling Series.** By Sidney G. Firman and Grace Elizabeth Sherman. Fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth years, 16¢ each. Teachers' manuals, 16¢ each. Silver, Burdett, 1935.

**Generalization and Transfer in Spelling.** By Arthur I. Gates. Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia, 1935.

**An Oral Language Practice Book.** By Mabel Vinson Cage. Harr Wagner, 1935. 90¢.

**Easy English Exercises,** rev. ed. by Ada Riddlebarger and Edna Parker Cotner. World Book Company, 1935.

## SCRIPT-PRINT AND BEGINNING READING AND SPELLING

(Continued from page 141)

find this statement regarding the effect of manuscript writing or reading. I quote: "There is considerable evidence that teaching children only to print while in the primary grades, that is, to use manuscript writing results in more rapid progress in reading. That its effect is wholesome seems to be an established fact."

From the limited evidence presented in this paper, there is at least a suggestion that manuscript writing may aid in spelling and it may aid children in expressing themselves more freely than does cursive. This field, the effect of manuscript writing on children's written composition work including spelling, invites further investigation.



## **Helps for Busy English Teachers**

### **THE EIGHT PARTS OF SPEECH**

By BLYNN E. DAVIS

A brief but comprehensive outline of the parts of speech presented so clearly and logically that they can be remembered. 30 cents.

### **TEACHING DIACRITICAL MARKS**

By N. E. HAMILTON

Twenty-nine lessons that will insure better results in the use of the dictionary. 20 cents.

### **TERM PLAN IN DICTATION ON PUNCTUATION**

By J. V. CALLAHAN &  
ESTELLA STERNGLANG

An Outline for twenty weeks' work in punctuation for the 6th grade. 15 cents.

### **PLAY'S THE THING**

A Manual of Drill Games. By MARY DAVIS and ANNIE E. HARRIS.

Includes 22 practical and interesting Spelling and Grammar Games as well as many more on other subjects for use in the grades. 60 cents.

### **OUTLINE STUDIES IN LITERATURE**

By MAUD E. KINGSLEY

Among the 94 outlines of this series are the following for use in the grades and Junior High School: Evangeline, Courtship of Miles Standish, Hiawatha, Snow Bound, Rip Van Winkle, Legend of Sleepy Hollow, Man Without a Country, Christmas Carol. 20 cents each. Send for complete catalog.

**The Palmer Company**

120 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass.

*"This is one of the  
magazines I want  
for my own"*

wrote a reader of THE REVIEW.  
You, too, will want to continue to receive your own copy of THE REVIEW.

Send in your renewal now. You may pay in September.

### **THE ELEMENTARY ENGLISH REVIEW**

*Two dollars and fifty cents a year*

Box 67, North End Station  
Detroit, Michigan

## **A READING VOCABULARY FOR PRIMARY GRADES**

By ARTHUR I. GATES

The new edition of this widely used vocabulary comprises a list of 1,811 words selected as suitable for use in all forms of reading material in Grades 1 to 3. The list is given first in alphabetical form with rank noted and second in 500's according to frequency.

*32 pp. Paper 35 cents*

*In press: DIFFICULTIES IN SPELLING AND UNDERSTANDING 3,876 COMMON WORDS, by Professor Gates. This publication will give reliable data on the "hard spot," most common misspellings, average grade position, and grade level of comprehension.*

**BUREAU OF PUBLICATIONS**  
Teachers College, Columbia University  
New York City



Lucy Fitch Perkins, author of "The Twins" series, in the garden of her home  
in Evanston, Illinois